



AETC News Clips

Randolph AFB, Texas



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Military City U.S.A. remembers vital flight

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Sig Christenson
Express-News Military Writer

The flight over Fort Sam Houston lasted just seven minutes, about the time it takes for a commercial jet to get high enough for passengers to turn on their laptop computers.

But the six orbits 1st Lt. Benjamin Foulois made low and slow over Fort Sam's sprawling parade field on March 2, 1910, changed everything for San Antonio, the nation and the world.

It was America's first successful military flight. On a personal note, the day marked Foulois' first solo, first landing and first crash. Emerging from it unhurt, he then invented the seat belt.

"With a great amount of courage and determination, Lt. Benjamin Foulois left the shackles of this earth," Gen. William R. Looney III, head of the Air Education and Training Command at Randolph AFB, said Thursday during a ceremony commemorating the 96th anniversary of Foulois' flight. "And so began military aviation."

So too began a new era for San Antonio. The birth of Military City, U.S.A., came after Foulois had logged 54 minutes as an observer next to Wilbur Wright, who flew the plane. Foulois' experimental flights in a Wright Flyer dubbed Aeroplane No. 1 delivered dramatic change to the Alamo City.

Within a decade there were two new flight training installations here, Kelly and Brooks, followed later by Randolph and Lackland AFB.

Those bases and Fort Sam turned a dusty backwater town into a hub of military activity, a pillar of the city's economy. The military contributed \$5 billion in 2004, ranking it No. 3 behind tourism and health care-bioscience research, said Bill Mock, vice president of the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

The ascent of the military began in obscurity. Foulois flew as slowly as 30 mph on his maiden voyage, and made three more flights that day before a fuel pipe cracked and he crash-landed. Eight years later, recruits and their biplanes were buzzing over Kelly and Brooks fields. Randolph Field opened in 1930 and soon became known as the "West Point of the Air."



John Davenport/Express-News
Air Force Gen. William R. Looney III and Lt. Col. Sandra Miarecki bow their heads after a wreath-laying ceremony honoring Lt. Benjamin Foulois and his pioneer flights at Fort Sam Houston on Thursday. These flight tests in a Wright biplane demonstrated the value of the airplane as a military weapon.

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A city that had served as a way station for many Army legends, among them Robert E. Lee and Dwight D. Eisenhower, produced some of its most memorable pilots, including Charles Lindbergh and Jimmy Doolittle.

Small fields became big bases that would see makeovers in their missions. Kelly evolved into a depot where thousands of Hispanics found upward mobility as aircraft workers. Brooks became an Air Force research hub. Both were victims of base closure rounds, but carry on as public-private ventures.

The crowd broke into applause after a pair of Stearman biplanes flown by Jim Ebell and Mickey Chadwell flew gracefully over the grounds, banked right and made a long lazy eight, looping around the old Brooke Army Medical Center complex before making one final pass.

Retired Army Col. Stewart Wyland asked the spectators to imagine that four vintage helicopters, one of them a CH-47 Chinook, were on the parade field. The choppers weren't there because their crews have either gone to war or are preparing to deploy.

"From the humble beginnings here in 1910, the U.S. military — Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines — has become the dominant air power in the world," said Wyland, 55, of San Antonio.

"This created the military city of San Antonio," said Looney, who called his service "a force unlike none other," ready to fight anywhere, at any moment. "We've been embraced by the city and by the citizens of San Antonio, and we thrive here."



AETC News Clips

Little Rock AFB, Ark.



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Air base borrowing to fill out C-130 fleet

No repairs yet for 33 planes idled in '05

BY AMY SCHLESING ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

In the year since the Air Force grounded and restricted a chunk of its aging C-130 fleet, Little Rock Air Force Base has been forced to borrow planes to make up for those deemed too dangerous to fly.

Fractures in some wing boxes resulted in about 100 of the oldest and hardest used C-130s being grounded or placed on restricted use in February 2005.

The order forced airmen from the 61st Airlift Squadron of the 463rd Airlift Group at Little Rock Air Force Base to climb into three of those planes at an air base in the Arabian Peninsula and fly home to Jacksonville. There, the planes joined 30 grounded and restricted planes on the flight line, dramatically shrinking the base's fleet.

None of the grounded or restricted planes have been repaired by replacing their wing boxes — structures that attach wings to the C-130 fuselage and absorb some of the stress flying puts on wings.

On Thursday, the Air Force's Air Mobility Command released a five-year plan to replace the wing boxes in planes nearing the flight time that mandates a plane be placed on limited use. The plan aims to stretch the life of its aging fleet of cargo planes until replacements arrive.

The Air Force has about 450 C-130 aircraft in its fleet, including the Vietnam-era E-model, H models from the 1980s and early 1990s, and the new J model.

As of Thursday, the command reported 82 grounded or restricted E and H model C-130s. About 18 of the initially grounded planes nationwide were permanently retired in recent months.

Of the 82 affected C-130s, 33 are at Little Rock Air Force Base — accounting for more than 40 percent of the nation's problem C-130s. Little Rock Air Force Base is the largest C-130 base in the world.

"People need to understand that we are worked more with less," said Lt. Jon Quinlan, spokesman for the base. "We are falling behind. Our on-time graduation rate [for training C-130 crews] is down. And the aircraft is the biggest thing holding us back."

The restricted E and H models are still flying, but they are strictly limited. They can only fly 19 hours per month compared with 80 hours a month for an unrestricted C-130. Restricted aircraft are limited to higher altitude flying where turbulence is lighter and are banned from fast, steep landings.

Concerns over fractures around rivets in wing boxes resulted in the 2005 policy that automatically grounded C-130s with 45,000 equivalent baseline hours and restricted planes with 38,000 baseline hours. Baseline hours are computed using a formula that calculates wear and tear based on hours flown, maintenance issues and wartime, tactical flying.

Lt. Col. Doug Kennedy, chief of the Tactical Airlift Section, Force Structure Branch of Air Mobility Command, said engineers recognized that the wing box life was not as long as

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PAGE:

ISSUE DATE: 3 Mar 06



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predicted.

"For example, the H-models were expected to face this event in fiscal year 2015," he said.

Many H models have wing box fractures now. So replacement wing boxes are not just planned for those planes currently restricted, but also those nearing that flying-time limit.

It is not known which planes will get replacement wing boxes first. Air Force engineers are working to prioritize planes based on which planes are young enough to make a \$9 million wing-box replacement economically feasible and which planes should be scrapped and replaced by the new, \$80 million J-model C-130.

Those are rolling into the fleet at a rate of less than 10 a year.

The wing-box plan calls for one wing-box replacement in 2007, 4 in 2008, 17 in 2009, 18 in 2010, 18 in 2011 and 17 in 2012.

"By fiscal year 2012 we will have accepted/installed enough new center wings to cover aircraft restricted by that date. Beyond Fiscal Year 2012 we will be ahead of the curve and have wing boxes to install prior to aircraft restricting or grounding (assuming additional funds are allocated beyond Fiscal Year 2012 to purchase the wing boxes)," said a spokesman for the 330th Tactical Air Support Command in an e-mail statement Thursday.

Meanwhile, the Air Force is sharing planes.

About half of the 61st Airlift Squadron's 15 planes were affected — five grounded and two restricted.

The squadron loaned out its remaining fleet to other units and shared the 50th Airlift Squadron of the 463rd's relatively new H models.

The two 61st planes placed on restriction are the only Hercules in the squadron's inventory.

"The number of planes in the group is halved," said Maj. Dave Kuenzli, 61st Squadron operations officer. "Now we operate as a group with 14 planes."

Before the grounding, the 463rd had 30 planes.

Most of those planes are dispatched to Iraq or undergoing a maintenance overhaul in preparation to head to war or be used in recovery after their return.

"As a group, we have four airplanes to train on at any given time," Kuenzli said.

"If you're lucky," added Lt. Col. Marty Pruitt, commander of the 463rd Maintenance Squadron.

Pilots and crews are required to fly a certain number of missions each month.

To help meet demand, National Guard units in Wyoming and North Carolina have loaned the 463rd planes for Iraq.

"They're really sacrificing their readiness for us," Kuenzli said.

Little Rock Air Force Base is also home to the 314th Airlift Wing, the C-130 schoolhouse where all C-130 crews train to become tactical pilots, engineers, navigators and loadmasters. The 314th trains crews on every model of the C-130, the E, H and J model.

Of about 40 planes, the 314th had nine planes grounded and 17 restricted. It's using one of the 61st's planes to help fill the gap.

It is not yet known when Little Rock Air Force Base will get replacement wing boxes to restore its fleet.

They only know it will be years.

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PAGE:

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Those stress fractures around the rivets in the wing box are signs of both the age of some of the aircraft and the stress of wartime use of some newer models.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the C-130 is relied on more heavily than any other cargo plane.

"We had a 65 percent commitment rate one year ago. We have a 70 percent commitment rate right now," Pruitt said. "That means we use our aircraft to fly more than we did last year."

With the war on terror, wing boxes and replacement planes go to special operations units first and then deployable units like the 463rd.

"It's all about priorities," Kuenzli said. "The warfighter comes first."

C-130 repair

The wing box on a C-130 attaches the wings to the fuselage, absorbing some of the stress for the wings. Over time, the rivets suffer stress fractures that weaken that bond between the wings and the plane.

